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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 001173

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TAGS: PREL PGOV GG RS
SUBJECT: GOR UNMOVED BY UPROAR ON UAV INCIDENT

REF: A. MOSCOW 1122
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Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (B/D).

¶11. (C) Summary: According to a debrief by the UK Embassy, UK Under Secretary Rickett used his April 24 meeting with First Deputy Foreign Minister Denisov to express concern over the UAV shoot-down and presidential "instructions," drawing from the four Friends' statement issued at the April 23 UN special session. (Note: The four Friends will demarche the MFA on April 29.) As in his previous conversations with the Ambassador, Denisov refused to be drawn out on Russia's possible involvement in the shoot-down; instead, he focused on the drone as a provocation and Russia's firm commitment to improve conditions in Abkhazia. Working-level MFA officials gave us a similar response on April 25, underscoring Georgia's "violation" of the 1994 Agreement. In an April 25 press conference, Lavrov stated that the crisis was not in Russian-Georgian relations but in Georgian-Abkhaz/South Ossetian relations, and called on Georgia to normalize its ties with the separatist regions. Local press reports, which provided detailed coverage of the incident all week, emphasized that the April 24 UNSC session produced no resolution. End summary.

UK Presses on Instructions and UAV Shoot Down

¶12. (C) According to an April 25 debrief by the U.K. Embassy, visiting UK Permanent Under Secretary Rickett used his April 24 meeting with First Deputy Foreign Minister Denisov to address both the presidential "instructions" and the UAV shoot-down, noting that he was drawing from the language approved by the four Friends (U.S., UK, France, and Germany) in New York. Rickett expressed concern at the April 16 decree, which was at odds with the Friends, support for Georgian territorial integrity and UNSC 1808; said that its implementation would jeopardize the peace process; and urged its reverse or non-implementation. He expressed alarm at the shoot-down, noted that the aircraft was a MIG-29 and that its presence constituted a serious escalation. In addition to condemning all military escalations, Rickett called for a UNOMIG investigation.

¶13. (C) Denisov responded that it was wrong for the four Friends to agree on a text, while excluding Russia from the discussion. He did not argue that Russia did not shoot down the aircraft. Instead, Denisov focused on the drone as a provocation, whose presence Georgia only admitted to after evidence of the shoot-down came to light. Denisov lingered on what Georgia meant to Russia: "Georgia may be your friend, but she is our relative." Denisov argued that there are more Georgians in Russia than in Georgia, with many Georgians staffing the Russian MFA. While Russia respected Georgia's sovereignty, it had a duty to support Russian passport holders. Denisov quoted an ICJ ruling (without citing the case), along the lines that 'non-recognition should not

deprive any people of the benefit of cooperation.' It was Russia's obligation to help Abkhazia return to a normal way of life. While sidestepping a debate over whether Kosovo was a precedent, Denisov stressed that for the Abkhaz it was, and that put pressure on Russia to respond. Denisov amplified on Russian efforts to improve bilateral ties with Georgia. While acknowledging Rickett's charge that Russian actions added to the fears and tensions, Denisov said Russia was working to calm relations. He gave no indication that Russia would respond favorably to the demarche.

MFA Sticks to Its Story on 1994 Agreement "Violations"

¶4. (C) In our separate meetings on April 25, MFA Fourth CIS Department Deputy Directors Yevgeniy Tarabrin and Aleksey Pavlovskiy refused to be pinned down on Russian involvement in the UAV incident, pointing instead to the April 22 MFA statement, which accused Georgia of violating the 1994 Moscow Agreement and UNSCR 1808. Tarabrin told us that a spy plane used for military purposes where it was not "authorized" to fly "deserved" to be shot down. Both stressed that the video tape needed to be carefully studied because "computers could generate all kinds of images these days." Tarabrin asked, "Why was the camera not pointing at the land it was to survey but at the airplane used to destroy the UAV?" In response to unbridgeable differences between an L-39 and a MIG, Tarabin asserted that the Abkhaz plane that had flown the mission was equipped with a missile pod.

¶5. (U) In an April 25 press conference, FM Lavrov said that he saw no crisis in Russia-Georgia relations, but there was one in Georgia's relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Lavrov blamed Georgia for not establishing a "valid dialogue"

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with the separatist regions and for inflaming the situation by announcing its aspirations to join NATO. NATO could not solve all Georgia's problems, with Lavrov arguing that all those who were pulling Georgia "artificially" to NATO should understand this point. Lavrov emphasized that Tbilisi's refusal to sign the non-use-of-force agreement, which both the OSCE and UN had recommended. Lavrov said, "I would like to see the reactions of these people to the Georgians' statement that they flew UAVs, were flying and would continue to fly them." Lavrov claimed that the GOR would raise its "many questions" on the incident with the OSCE's Forum for Security Cooperation. He underscored that Russia wanted to improve the relationship with Georgia but GOR efforts had not been reciprocated by Georgia.

Russian Press Give Mixed Assessment of GOR Position

¶6. (U) Among the ample Russian press coverage, several gave detailed accounts of the different features of an L-39 and a MIG. Novaya Gazeta said the claim that an Abkhaz L-39 shot down the drone was simply "laughable." Its April 24 article argued that Moscow was showing Tbilisi what it could do -- recognize the separatist regimes, bomb a drone, and more -- with neither the West nor NATO able to help Georgia. In contrast, Rossiskaya Gazeta characterized the incident as another attempt by Saakashvili to divert attention from pre-election domestic problems. Many reports focused on the complicated nature of the bilateral relationship, and its "action-reaction" cycle fueled by misunderstanding and mistrust. On April 25, all major press reported on the April 24 UNSC session on Russia-Georgia relations, emphasizing that it failed to produce a statement.

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